

# COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA

*Virginia State Fire Marshal's Office  
Virginia Department of Fire Programs*

## **For Immediate Release**

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## ***Stay safe while keeping warm this winter season***

*~ State agencies provide advice on heating safety, warns of carbon monoxide dangers~*

**Richmond, VA** – In 2003, heating equipment was involved in more than 53,000 U.S. home fires, 260 deaths, 1,260 injuries and \$494 million in direct property damage, according to a report from the National Fire Protection Association. From January through November 2006 in Virginia, approximately 15 percent of home fires were related to heating sources.

With more families turning toward alternative sources of home heating to save on high fuel costs, the use of wood burning stoves, space heaters, and more has increased. With it, the risk of fire and carbon monoxide poisoning has also increased.

The Virginia State Fire Marshal's Office and the Virginia Department of Fire Programs urge citizens to be aware of the dangers and take precautions for safety this year.

"While the weather has been relatively mild so far, the winter season is just beginning in Virginia and the time to take precautions is now," said State Fire Marshal Ed Altizer. "It is important to prepare now for keeping your home warm and safe this season, being ready in case you need to use a generator, and taking the time now to protect yourself and your family from potential carbon monoxide poisoning."

### **Winter Heating and Carbon Monoxide Safety Tips:**

- When purchasing a new space heater, smoke detector, or carbon monoxide alarm, make sure it carries the mark of an independent testing laboratory;
- Have fuel-burning heating equipment (fireplaces, furnaces, water heaters, wood and coal stoves, space, or portable heaters) and chimneys inspected by a professional each year;
- Ensure your fireplace has a sturdy screen to prevent spark fires, allow fireplace and wood stove ashes to cool before disposing in a metal container;
- Use only wood that is properly seasoned to reduce creosote build-up;
- Ensure that gas-fueled heating devices are installed with the proper ventilation; when using a fireplace, open the flue;

- Have fixed space heater units professionally installed or inspected by a qualified technician, and maintain a 36-inch clearance between space heaters and anything flammable;
- Turn off portable space heaters when sleeping or leaving the room;
- Closely watch children and pets in rooms with heating equipment, and keep them safely away;
- Never use your oven or grill to heat your home;
- Install a carbon monoxide (CO) alarm in central location outside of each sleeping area to provide early warning of accumulating CO; and
- Test smoke and CO alarms at least once per month.

### **Generator Safety:**

- Regardless of whether the garage doors are open, do not run a vehicle, generator, or other fueled engine or motor indoors. Generators should be operated in well-ventilated locations outdoors where exhaust fumes cannot enter the home through windows, doors, or other openings;
- Turn generators off and let them cool down before refueling;
- Never store fuel for your generator indoors; store them away from any fuel burning appliance such as gas water heaters, etc.;
- Plug appliances directly into generators, or use heavy duty outdoor-rated extension cords that are free of cuts or tears. Use extension cords with three prongs and a grounding pin. Do not power the house wiring by plugging the generator into a wall outlet;
- If you must connect the generator to the house wiring to power appliances, have a qualified electrician install a properly rated transfer switch in accordance with the National Electric Code and all applicable state and local electrical codes.

“These are the leading months for home fires and we all need to take extra care to protect our families and loved ones,” says W.G. “Billy” Shelton Jr., executive director of VDFP. “Loss of life and property resulting from heating fires can be prevented by being able to identify potential hazards and following these simple safety tips.”

The Virginia State Fire Marshal’s Office is administered by the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD). DHCD regulates Virginia’s building and fire codes, provides training and certification for building officials, and invests more than \$100 million each year into housing and community development projects throughout the state. DHCD is committed to creating safe, affordable, and prosperous communities to live, work and do business in Virginia. Visit the DHCD Web site at: [www.dhcd.virginia.gov](http://www.dhcd.virginia.gov).

The Virginia Department of Fire Programs (VDFP) provides fire and emergency services support to communities throughout Virginia in the areas of professional development, public fire and life safety education, technical assistance, research, advocacy, operational support and funding. For more information on home fire safety, please visit the VDFP website at [www.vafire.com](http://www.vafire.com) or contact your local fire department.

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